

STEEL OR STONE?

A message delivered by Pastor Brett Sisley
To the congregation at Bellevue Church on 6, August, 2016

As a pastor I walk with people through rough times.

Yesterday...

Being a pastor is more than a job description. "Pastor" is the name of a specific spiritual gift to the church.

To pastor is to shepherd. This is why am always there—not simply because it's my job—but primarily because it is my calling. It's how I'm designed.

Part of being a shepherd is fighting people's battles along with them.

But another important part is helping those same people learn to fight their own battles—and as they become proficient, do the same for others.

This is where today's message comes from.

It's directly from my heart.

And my prayer is that today, each of us leaves here better equipped to fight and win the enemies and battles we face.

What are the enemies & battles we fight?

Sickness / Death

Sorrow / Regret

Deception / Temptation

Lack

Identity / Significance

Steel or Stone? The story of David and Goliath.

We've all heard this story before.

Not going to talk about how big Goliath was—nor the size of his spear, or the weight of his armor.

This morning, with this well-known story as case-in-point, we're going to talk about fighting giants God's way.

Our text however is found in 1 Cor. 1, verses 26-29.

²⁶For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

God's ways are not like our own.

God's wisdom is foolishness to the mortal mind.
God chose David who was weak to put to shame the giant Goliath.

To set aside steel and choose stone is foolishness.
After all, steel represents the ingenuity of man.

But God chose stone to put on notice the pathetic limitations of humanity.

If we are going to face and defeat the giants that confront us, we must learn the wisdom of God.

1 Sam. 17:1, 2-4, 8, 10, 11

¹Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle. [...] ²Saul and the men of Israel were gathered, and encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in line of battle against the Philistines. ³And the Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them. ⁴And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. [...] ⁸He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? [...] ¹⁰"I defy the ranks of Israel this day. [...] ¹¹When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

From this section, we learn:

The Israelites are at war, not peace.

They're not losing, but they're not winning either.

Their enemy has a giant fighting for them.

The enemy and their giant are an affront to God's people / God Himself.

Question is: How are they going to fight this battle?

The question for us is the same.

How are we going to fight those things which oppose us?

Are we going to fight, or shrink back?

Like Goliath, the enemies & battles we face are an affront to God's people.

We are God's people.

Cancer is an affront to the perfection of God's creation. It's a giant with its middle finger raised to the heavens.

The lostness and ruin brought on by God's people compromising what they know is right—or failing to follow through. These are the result of lies spun by the devil himself and sold to saints.

There is no shortage of giants facing us. We live, work, go to school...in a war zone.

Every morning, we wake up, and head out to the battle field.
It is a spiritual battle we fight.

Eph. 6:12 says:

¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

**This morning, I want you to think of the giants facing you.
They could be things that threaten you here and now.
They could be things that live in the past.
Or they could be things that loom in your future.**

Whatever they are, bring them to your mind.

Look them in the face.

This morning we're going to do battle.

And we're going to leave their corpses at the altar and move on.

Continuing with our story in 1 Samuel...

1 Sam. 17:12, 14-15, 17, 20, 23-26

¹² Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse, who had eight sons. [...] ¹⁴ David was the youngest. The three eldest followed Saul, ¹⁵ but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem. ¹⁷ And Jesse said to David his son, "Take for your brothers an ephah of this parched grain, and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers. [...]"

²⁰ David rose early in the morning and left the sheep with a keeper and took the provisions and went, as Jesse had commanded him. When he arrived at the Israelite's encampment [...] David left the provisions in the charge of the keeper of the baggage and ran to the ranks to greet his brothers. ²³ As he talked with them, the champion, the Philistine Goliath, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him.

²⁴ All the men of Israel, when they saw Goliath, fled from him and were terrified. ²⁵ They said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? How he defies Israel? The king will enrich the man who kills him with great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father's house free in Israel."

²⁶ And David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

In this section, we read about David:

He's the youngest of eight sons.

Instead of fighting with his older brothers, David is back home tending sheep.

His dad sends him to the battlefield with provision.

Once there, David sees the giant, Goliath.

Unlike the terrified soldiers around him, David is angered by Goliath's taunts.

Saul had offered riches for the one who killed Goliath.

But the promise of riches doesn't even register in David's mind.

Instead, he asks: “What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?”

Despite everything going on—the battle, the giant, freaked-out soldiers, David mind is keenly attuned to the spiritual reality on the battlefield before him:

This giant standing before him is nothing more than a reproach to God’s people. He is a living, breathing, lie...wearing armor.

If we are going to fight giants and win, we must be tuned into the spiritual reality we live in:
The enemies and battles we face are a reproach against the peace, harmony, and perfection that God created.

2 Cor. 10:3-6

³ For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh.

⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

⁶ being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

Once we acknowledge that this is a spiritual battle, the next step is clear: we must be properly prepared.

Anecdote: racing / friend Donny

You don’t want to bring natural weapons to a spiritual battle.

How do we prepare to fight a spiritual battle?

Is it through “hail Mary” prayers? “God...HELP ME!”

Do we make deals with God? “God if you get me out of this...”

Proper preparation starts with deciding who is best equipped to fight and to win.

This isn’t the natural way of things, is it?

Not easy to surrender control of your life when you’ve got life licked.

But then, there’s something about getting beat that kicks you in the butt.

When a giant steps towards you and says:

You can’t pay that bill.

You won’t get that job.

You’re not good enough.

Your marriage is going to fail.

God’s not going to forgive you.

These are lies. Because...

The truth of the situation is that God loves you.

He takes care of His own. He’s done it before, He will do it again.

But that’s not what the enemy is saying.

This problem is gigantic—it’s an ocean you can’t cross.

Everyone else is scared.

Fear is like a black hole threatens to suck you in.

Remember that word “fear.” We’re going to come back to it in a moment

1 Sam. 17:31-37

³¹When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul, and he sent for him. ³²And David said to Saul, “Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.” ³³And Saul said to David, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth.” ³⁴But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. ³⁶Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, **for he has defied the armies of the living God.**” ³⁷And David said, “The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” And Saul said to David, “Go, and the LORD be with you!”

This section is the focal point of the story. And there’s a lot going on...

First, David’s bold words find their way back to Saul—and Saul call for David.
Now, please remember that Saul and David already knew each other.
Saul respected David.

And, also remember that David has already been anointed by Samuel to be Saul’s successor—though Saul is unaware.

David remains determined in front of the king. “Let no man’s heart fail...”

Saul tries to discourage David.

David responds by recounting his valiant exploits as a shepherd.

He ends by saying: “

“...this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God.” ³⁷ [...] “The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.”

David is confident of victory because He knows God personally.

He knows God loves His people.

David knows that God can do the impossible.

And he knows that rebellion and lies cannot stand in His presence.

Rightly appropriating our fear is essential for defeating giants.

We touched on the word “fear” a moment ago. And I want to return to it now.

Fear is an operative word in this story and in our lives.

When the doctor calls and says “The cancer is back,” fear is present.

When the bill collectors are threatening to garnish your paychecks: fear is real.

When the enemy whispers in your ear that “You’ll never find your calling in life,” fear is a natural response.

Whatever it is, whatever the giant or giants are, fear is a part of facing and defeating them.

I want to tell you about another kind of fear: the kind of fear that David had.

You might say: “Wait a minute, Brett—you just got done saying David wasn’t afraid. It’s not that kind of fear...

The kind of fear that David had is the key to winning preparation for the battles and giants we face.

It’s the fear of the Lord.

I know we’ve probably heard about it before—maybe as much as David and Goliath. But there is something fresh here that I believe God wants us to get this morning. The fear of the Lord isn’t quaking in fear.

Fearing the Lord is counting yourself subject in all matters to the King of Kings.
He is our master, our liege.

David knew first-hand the glory of God Almighty.
There is no one like Him.
He dwells in inapproachable light.
There is no shadow of turning in Him.
And His light is the light of truth.

**To be subject to God is to live, move, and have our being in Him.
And if we are in Him—no enemy can defeat us.**

Rom. 8:37-39 says:

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**And He’s more than an overlord; He’s also faithful, patient teacher.
If we listen, He’s teaching us that He knows best.**

Do you know that the oft-quoted verse, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” appears not once, but three times in the book of Proverbs?

To make yourself subject to the King of Kings is the beginning of wisdom.

True wisdom, according to God, looks like giving Him the glory and honor that He alone deserves.

What’s more telling about each of these similar verses is what immediately precedes them.

Prov. 1:5-7

Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, ⁶ to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Prov. 9:9-10

Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

Prov. 5:32-33

Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence. ³³The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor.

Given the consistency of the context for “The fear of the Lord...” it is clear that:

God wants us to grow in wisdom

And that this Godly wisdom is learned through experience.

Godly wisdom is why David recounted to Saul the mighty works of God in his life.

And, because was subject in all matters to the King of Kings, he knew that Goliath would fall.

The wisdom that is “the fear of the Lord” begins with surrender of all we are and all we possess. This includes the battles we face.

This is what Solomon is saying to us, repeatedly, in Proverbs: **true wisdom looks like surrender.**

I don't know it all!

I can't do it all myself!

I can't win this battle on my own!

When we surrender control of our lives to God, *He* fights our battles—and He never loses.

His strategy is perfect.

If we learn the lesson wisdom teaches, we begin to trust His direction completely—*especially* when it doesn't make sense to us.

1 Sam. 17:38-40

³⁸Then Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail, ³⁹and David strapped his sword over his armor. And he tried in vain to go, for he had not tested them. Then David said to Saul, “I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them.” So David put them off. ⁴⁰Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine.

The best Saul could do was give this brave young man his metal armor.

Saul had never become wise through the fear of the Lord.

For him, the battle was purely natural.

Some scraps of metal were all that stood between him and his enemy.

While high-tech for the day, armor alone wasn't enough.

He had brought a knife to a gun fight—or a tin can to a giant fight.

David on the other hand feared God.

All he had was subject to the Commander of heaven's legions.

Godly wisdom told him to leave the steel behind and—contrary to reason—pick up five smooth stones.

Defeating the giants that come against us isn't about "being tough," getting more education, making more money—or any other so-called solution the world offers us.

It's not even about doing "our own thing" and asking God to help.

If we are to win the battles we fight, it's going to take complete surrender.
Did you catch that?

The key to victory is *surrender*.

In the time remaining, let's slay some giants and leave them here.
Earlier, I asked you to bring them to mind.
If you haven't already, do so now.

Victory comes through surrender. These are spiritual battles. Give them over to the Lord.

Hear the voice of Godly wisdom as it speaks to you.

If there are areas in your life that you have yet to surrender to God. Give them up. Become subject to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Win. Today.

Whatever we give to Him wins.

As the band comes and plays softly, meet that giant here at the altar. Fight him on your knees.
Whatever it is:

Finances, career, relationship, guilt, shame, regret, brokenness...

Surrender all today. Know victory.
Come.